Administrative, Educational, and Student Support (AES) Unit Review Guidelines

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics

Borough of Manhattan Community College

August 2019

Purpose and Benefit

Borough of Manhattan Community College makes a distinction between assessment and evaluation. Assessment is about continuous improvement and is reflected in the assessment of student learning (SLOs) or Support Outcomes (SOs) while evaluation is represented through the AES unit review process. The Unit Review process is a comprehensive review of activities for the past several years, but the impetus for planning and most impactful data utilized during the process comes from the annual assessments. Assessment and evaluation are conducted as foundational elements of the College's institutional effectiveness system and, accordingly, assessments and evaluations emanating from AES units are as important to improving the environment for teaching and learning as those conducted in the academic programs. Additional information including the framework for institutional effectiveness, BMCC's assessment philosophies, electronic resources, and other helpful information is available on the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics (IEA) homepage (https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/iresearch/).

ASSESSMENT, UNIT REVIEW, AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

While assessment is widely understood as important and necessary for improving the environment for student learning and intentionally designing for student success, it is one piece of a larger effort. The same holds true for unit review, which utilizes the information from the assessments to assist with evaluation of mission and goal achievement as well as future planning. Both of these activities are part of BMCC's institutional effectiveness system – a system which allows for documentation of progress toward achievement of the College's mission as well as CUNY's various university and sector goals. As a foundational element of the comprehensive institutional effectiveness system, assessment and evaluation, along with planning and resource allocation, provides BMCC with the information necessary to ensure improvement to the teaching and learning environment.

FIGURE 1: THE BMCC INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS MODEL

Borough of Manhattan Community College Institutional Effectiveness Model
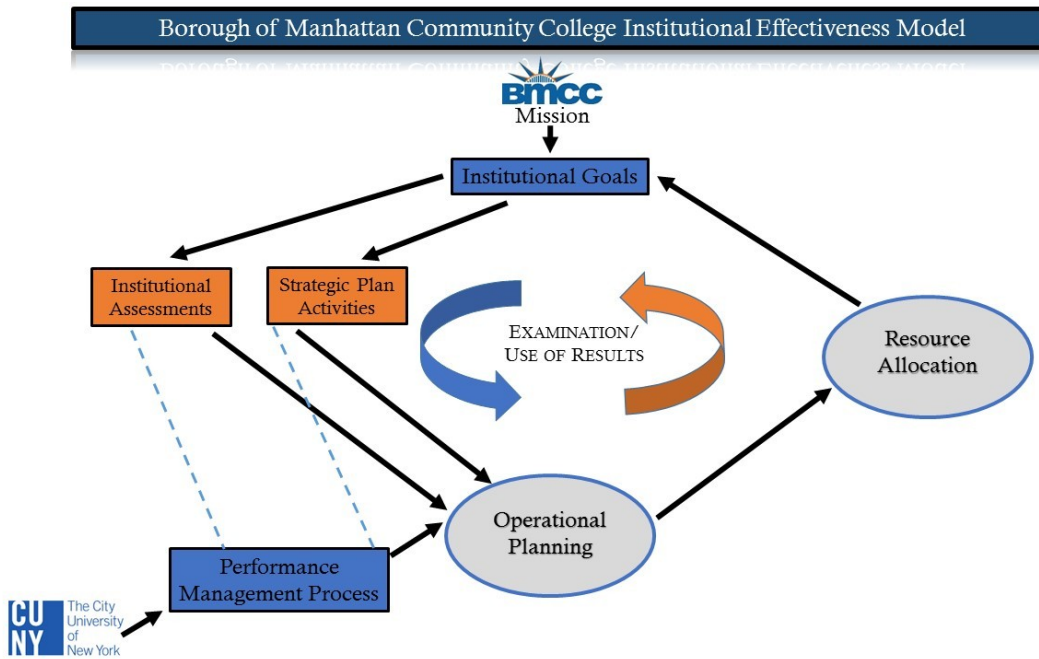
ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS AND AES UNIT REVIEW

As noted in the BMCC Institutional Effectiveness Plan, the College's evaluation cycle is five years. Between the five year periods in which identified AES units undergo a yearlong review, four years of annual assessments of SLOs and SOs will occur. It should be noted that every outcome must be assessed at least once during this time frame so that the unit can evaluate how effectively it has met its goals. It is essential that the results of the annual assessments address use of results for the improvement of educational effectiveness. This process ensures that we stay in compliance with MSCHE Standards IV, V, and VI. This evaluation will also be necessary for determining how to plan for future assessments.

The unit review provides an opportunity for units to stop and determine the meaning of the various assessments, to gauge progress, examine philosophies and visions, and establish a plan of action for success in the future. Rather than engaging in assessments, AES units meet internally with staff in the unit, collaborate with colleagues whom they work with regularly, and receive input from external parties regarding their effectiveness and current direction. Additionally, staff from IEA are available and will help facilitate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) summary, assist with logistics, and will attend internal committee meetings as ex-officio members to provide guidance.

The AES Unit Review allows units to take approximately 18 months to examine how effectively they have been meeting goals and making progress towards achieving their unit mission. In addition to reviewing results and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the SLO and SO assessments, the process allows for and encourages substantial discussions with unit staff, colleagues, and external evaluators about the past, present, and future of the unit. While highly systematic and incremental in nature, the unit review process at BMCC is guided by flexibility and the ability to contextualize and customize. Units will have different goals and objectives for their review and this is taken into account both within the *BMCC AES Unit Review Template* and the support provided by IEA. The template includes a section that allows for the units to identify important information not required and IEA staff will work with the unit throughout the process to ensure that all ideas are supported. Some potential goals of the review may include:

- To determine the extent to which SLO's and SO's are met;
- To determine if the existing scope of work is appropriate;
- To establish benchmarks and gather data designed to evaluate unit direction;
- To better understand how to more effectively collaborate across units;
- To measure successes against external benchmarks and best practices; and
- To determine where opportunities for greater success lie and establish plans to realize the opportunities.

These are among the many reasons to engage in an AES Unit Review and the unit should consider, during the planning stage, what the objectives of the review are. IEA will work with the unit to accomplish these objectives. Additionally, the length of the report should be appropriate to the size of the unit.

It is also important to note that there are three phases to the unit review process. While addressed in depth in the timeline, the phases are:

- **Planning** (semester and summer before the review begins) – the phase that lays the groundwork for the review. This typically includes gathering 5-7 years of data, assessments, reports, and other information that can assist with the evaluation of whether goals have been achieved. Additionally, the unit should consider internal committee members and external evaluators.

- **Development** (fall and early spring) – the phase in which writing of the review begins. The unit starts completing the unit review template; assembles the internal committee; participates in a SWOT; and completes all sections of the template prior to the external review section. This phase will initiate the development of internal recommendations for the unit.

- **External Review/Completion** (mid-late spring and summer) – the phase in which external evaluators provide guidance to the unit and the process is completed. The external evaluators will review the documentation, participate in a site visit, provide an oral report, and deliver a set of recommendations. The unit will then combine the internal and external recommendations, set up a four-year assessment and strategic activities plan, with the final report submitted to the appropriate VP/Dean.

THE INTERNAL COMMITTEE

The AES Unit Review internal committee should consist of no more than 12 members (excluding ex-officio members). Generally, this should be a maximum of 4-5 members from within the unit; additionally, the cabinet member responsible for the unit and a member from IEA will serve on the committee in an ex- officio capacity (if available). In addition to these individuals, again, consideration should be given to establishing an inclusive and representative group of individuals from units or academic departments with which the unit undergoing review interacts with on a regular basis. Where appropriate, units may want to consider students, advisory board members, or other external members. It is important to consider the breadth of daily activities to ensure representation from all units that have regular interaction with the unit. AES units should consider representation on the committee through the lens of anticipated review objectives. In other words, consider what you want the unit review to accomplish and include members who will be helpful in achieving the objectives. It is suggested that the committee consists of either all or a representative number of managers, assistant managers, and staff within the unit.

While the level of involvement from the internal committee will vary in accordance with the desired objectives (typically a committee member's involvement requires a 20-30 hour commitment during the academic year), there are three major functions for the committee:

1. Participate in the unit SWOT;
2. Review/contribute to the development of the unit review document; and
3. Meet with the external reviewers.

To guide the unit review process, the cabinet member responsible for the unit will appoint a unit review chairperson. While not required, it is recommended that the individual responsible for the day-to-day activities of the area serve as the chair. This individual is responsible for:

- Serving as the unit review liaison to IEA;
- Establishing an Internal Committee;
- Identifying and reaching out to external evaluators as well as coordinating site visit logistics; and
- Completing the final AES Unit Review report.

THE EXTERNAL REVIEW

It is essential that the unit not depend solely on internal data, opinions, and recommendations, but rather compare internally-generated information against external benchmarks and practices. Without this comparison, it is impossible for the unit to effectively understand the appropriateness of the mission, goals, and outcomes, the effectiveness of the evaluation, or the relevance of recommendations. The unit must work to select two individuals with significant experience, knowledge, and understanding of their mission. Doing so not only ensures better information, but also increased validity of the review process. Upon selecting two individuals, the unit should submit their choices to the appropriate VP/Dean for approval.

In general, it is recommended that two individuals are chosen for the external review; however, units can select more if deemed appropriate. The following must be considered when selecting the external members:

- At least one member should be from a CUNY institution and at least one should be from a community college. One individual can meet both of these standards. In addition, one member should be from outside CUNY. Reviewers will be considered in consultation with IEA and confirmed by the appropriate cabinet member.

- These individuals should be confirmed during the fall term of the unit review year to ensure participation.

- External evaluators are expected to not only review the template and provide recommendations, but also to spend time at BMCC during a site visit.

The unit must ensure that the external reviewers receive an electronic copy of the first six chapters of the report, plus any appendices, at least two weeks before the visit. During the visit, the reviewers will meet with the cabinet member(s) responsible for the area, staff from the unit, staff from IEA, the internal committee, and other groups as appropriate. Whenever possible, units should consider involving students, faculty, and advisory board members during the visit. The unit review chair is responsible, in collaboration with the cabinet member and IEA, for handling all visit logistics. This process should be completed at least one month prior to the visit. After the visit, external evaluators will have two weeks to submit a 2-3 page individual report on findings and recommendations. Up to two evaluators will an honorarium ($500) for their participation (IEA will assist with honorariums). Evaluators will be paid after their reports are submitted. Should there be any travel expenses for the external evaluators, it is the responsibility of the unit undergoing review.

THE AES UNIT REVIEW TEMPLATE

The report outline can be found below. The report is designed for the inclusion of all important documents such as meeting minutes, the SWOT report, and any additional information included as appendices. It is important to be thorough during the review, however, only pertinent information should be included.

Chapter 1: History

The history is an important section of the report because it sets the tone for the report and provides necessary context. While completing this chapter, the unit should consider what information is necessary for both internal and external reviewers to understand why the unit functions as it does today. While there are no requirements about the length of time to cover, units should identify any major technological, demographic, University, or College changes that have affected the unit).

Chapter 2: Unit Profile

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the unit. This summary will include information on the mission, goals, and outcomes, day-to-day functions, and structure and staffing. The goal of this section is to provide readers with a description of how the unit is staffed, whom it serves, the scope of activities, and a glimpse into the culture and climate that impacts operations.

- Unit Mission
- Unit Goals & Outcomes
- Affiliated Institutional Strategic Goals
- Affiliated Strategic Planning Outcomes
- Affiliated Strategic Planning Objectives
- How does your unit support equity and inclusion at the college?
- What strengths exist in regards to staffing? (Staffing chart should be attached)
- What challenges exist in regards to staffing?
- What methods are undertaken to ensure effective communication within the unit?
- Identify any gaps between job responsibilities and job descriptions
- List the professional development activities, by staff member, over the last 5 years
- Summary of Chapter 2

Chapter 3: Identification of Internal Committee Members

This is a short, but important section that should be used for planning the committee structure. The unit is asked to identify which units are interacted with most frequently and to then consider membership from those units. The unit under review should be very intentional about membership and the request for rationale is designed to assist the process.

- Identify 5 units your unit works with most frequently as well as the nature of the interactions
- Internal Committee Roster & convene date

Chapter 4: SWOT Analysis

The internal committee is expected to participate in a SWOT session that will be facilitated by IEA. The purpose of the meeting is to gather unique and diverse perspectives on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats surrounding the unit. IEA not only facilitates the SWOT, but also prepares a final summary of the discussion. The summary provided by IEA

should not be edited. The unit is expected to review the summary, respond to the questions, and include the document as an appendix in the final report. Review of the SWOT summary will be important as the unit prioritizes future assessments.

- Strengths: What are the most surprising results?
- Strengths: What are some ways the strengths can be enhanced/better leveraged?
- Weaknesses: What are the most surprising results?
- Weaknesses: What are some ways that the weaknesses can be mediated/transformed?
- Opportunities: What are the most surprising results?
- Opportunities: What are some ways that the opportunities can be realized?
- Threats: What were the most surprising results?
- Threats: What are some ways that the threats can be eliminated?
- Based on the findings of the SWOT what are the unit's proposed priorities?

Chapter 5: Planning and Assessment

In order to conduct a comprehensive, useful review, the unit requires data. Given that outcomes assessment is designed to regularly collect information on the effectiveness of goal attainment, it is the ideal data source for the AES Unit Review. The more years that a unit has to conduct systematic assessment, the easier it becomes to complete this section. In the meantime, however, IEA will work with the units during the planning phase to identify potential data sources from previous years and to connect them to current goals and outcomes. This information is essential when considering overall unit effectiveness.

- Please identify which outcomes have been assessed by the unit
- Summary of results and plans derived from previous year(s) results
- Identify changes implemented as a result of implementing plans driven by yearly assessments
- List of important activities and initiatives conducted over the past five years
- Please identify all current unit outcomes and the plan for assessment over the next four years. Be sure to include planned year of assessment and assessment method.

Chapter 6: Additional Information

Given the heterogeneity of the AES units, it is impossible for one template to provide all the information necessary for a sound review for every unit. In response, units are provided the opportunity to thoroughly consider categories or topics that must be considered based on their impact on the unit. This can include topics such as culture, technology, political environment, and numerous others. When identified, IEA will work with the unit to determine the appropriate sub questions to flesh about appropriate data. If appropriate, student focus groups should be held.

Chapter 7: External Evaluation

After receiving the final reports from the external evaluators, the unit will respond to the questions provided. In short, the unit should look at the observations, opinions, and

recommendations in the report and consider if the existing report should be revised as well as which recommendations should be included regarding future activities. The reports should also be included within the appendices.

Chapter 8: Final Conclusion

The unit is asked to indicate which improvements are planned and to complete an assessment and strategic activities four-year unit plan to guide annual assessments and strategic activities evaluations between unit reviews. As indicated in the BMCC Institutional Effectiveness Plan, annual assessment of student learning and support outcomes and evaluation of strategic activities are the foundation of operational planning. It should be noted that the planning matrix requires the unit to consider alignment with the strategic plan for all proposed activities.

- Four Year Operational Planning – Assessment and Strategic Actions

Timeline	Unit Goal	Unit Outcome	Planned Assessment/Activity	Resources Required	Strategic Plan Outcome alignment
Year 1					
Year 2					
Year 3					
Year 4					

It is important for the writers of the report (at the discretion of the chair and the committee) to remember that the report is being written for planning purposes and will be seen by external reviewers. In consideration, writers should:

- Avoid the use of institution specific jargon or acronyms unless necessary and appropriately explained;
- Be completely accurate and do not shy away from information that can be perceived negatively while also showing discretion (verbal conversations should occasionally remain verbal);
- Consider the full breadth, depth, and scope of the unit functions rather than honing in only on specific functions;
- Document alignment with institutional and unit mission and goals as well as the strategic plan where possible; and
- Increase the readability of the report through the use of action oriented language,

graphics/tables where possible, and including only significant appendices.

AES Unit Review Timeline

February – May

IEA meets with the unit and the cabinet member responsible for the unit to take the unit through an orientation. During the orientation, the unit is presented with the unit review guidelines, template, and past unit reviews. The unit should come to the meeting with a chairperson selected and part of the meeting will be spent brainstorming in preparation for data collection.

May – July

The unit works on compiling data and information in preparation for completion of the unit review. IEA works closely with the unit to determine if any new data or reports need to be generated for the review.

August – October

The first three chapters should be well underway when the internal committee conducts its first meeting at the end of September. Drafts of the first three chapters should be exchanged throughout October, completed prior to the end of the month, and shared with the internal committee before the November meeting when they will be finalized.

November

The internal committee conducts its second meeting, which includes the facilitation of a SWOT session by IEA. IEA analyzes the results and provides the report by **January 31st** (if SWOT is on schedule and held by **November 30th**). Finally, the unit identifies the external evaluators and confirms in consultation with IEA and the appropriate cabinet member. If student focus groups are held, the unit is responsible for identifying the students and scheduling the session. After scheduled and confirmed with IEA, IEA will provide report by January 31st (if student focus groups are held by **November 30th**)

December

The unit completes chapter four of the unit review and begins work on chapters five and six. In addition, final arrangements are made for the external review, which will occur in the spring. External evaluator names must be provided to IEA by **December 31st** to ensure timely payment of the honorarium to the evaluators.

January – March

The unit completes chapters five and six, and works with the internal committee on revisions. The revised document should be sent to the external evaluators two weeks prior to their visit.

<u>March – August</u>

The unit conducts the external evaluator site review by **June 30th**. The evaluators submit their final reports within two weeks of their visit and the unit completes chapter seven of the report. The unit incorporates the recommendations and priorities for improvement provided by the external evaluator, completes chapter eight and finalizes the unit review narrative. The final report is due **August 31st** to appropriate VP/Dean and IEA.

External Review Visit Guide

The external review visit is designed to be a collegial experience. It is an opportunity for colleagues from different academic institutions with like-experiences to provide feedback on the current program. Departments may want to consider selecting an external reviewer from an institution that they have a relationship with. After external reviewers have completed their site visit, the expectation is that each reviewer will submit their report to the Provost/Division VP to be used by the department for future planning.

External review visits should include, but are not limited to, the following components:

- Welcome and Introductions with AES unit review lead and IEA

- Visit with members of the internal committee

- Observation of the unit

- Meeting with students

- Meeting with unit staff members

- Opportunity to write notes or feedback while on-site

- Exit interview with the Provost/Division VP

External reviewers should be asked to identify strengths, weaknesses, and specific recommendations for improvement relative to the report as presented and observations from their visit.

Guiding Questions for External Reviewers Report

The purpose of the external review is to provide a broader and independent perspective on the quality of an AES unit. Each external reviewer submits a separate report. The questions below are intended to provide guidance for writing the report but are not meant to serve as a template for report. The final report should be no longer than 3-5 pages.

1. Review of unit mission, goals, and outcomes
   - Are the mission and goals clearly articulated, appropriate, and aligned with the institution's mission and goals
   - Are the learning outcomes clearly stated, appropriate, and adequate?

2. Review of staff skills, scholarship, and other strengths
   - What are the strengths of the staff in the unit, as presented and observed?
   - Are there any areas of expertise not represented among the staff that should be?

3. Review of assessment
   - Does the unit have adequate processes for determining the extent to which it is meeting stated goals and for using assessment results to improve outcomes and overall program quality?
   - Are there any areas of concern relative to the assessment of student learning?

4. Review of student satisfaction
   - Are there any concerns regarding student satisfaction as presented or observed?

5. Review of resources
   - Does the unit have sufficient resources to deliver a high quality program?
   - What additional resources, if any, would increase the program's quality?

6. Specific commendations, concerns, and recommendations
   - What are the unit's major strengths and weaknesses?
   - What specific recommendations do you have to improve student success and overall program quality?

Guidelines for Academic Program and AES External Review Services

All external reviewers for academic programs and AES review must be approved by the Senior Vice President /Provost. The reviewers' curriculum vitae and proposed travel plans must be submitted for review and approval.

The scheduled date and time of the review must be coordinated with the Senior Vice President/Provost's availability to meet with the reviewer and department/program head.

The honorarium for approved external reviewers is $500 and is processed according to the City of New York and City University of New York (CUNY) policy for payment to CUNY employees and non-CUNY employees.

Non-CUNY Employees
- IEA will be in direct contact with the external evaluators to provide the required paperwork for honorarium and site visit.
- Please allow up to 30 days for external evaluator to receive the honorarium after the external evaluator has submitted their final report and findings to the Provost

CUNY-Employees
- CUNY employees cannot receive an honorarium as an independent contractor.
  After the report is submitted, reviewed and approved by the Senior Vice President/Provost and the department/program head, a request is made to the college's budget office to transfer funds, in the amount of $500, to the reviewer's campus' budget office.

Travel Reimbursement
- The Office of Institutional Effectiveness does not provide funds for travel. Programs may use their own funds to bring in site visitors or can make an appeal with justification to The Senior Vice President/Provost who will review and consider requests for travel reimbursement for out-of-town external reviewers. These requests must be pre-approved or payment cannot be guaranteed. Reviewers who reside in New York City boroughs and the tristate area are abundant and preferred.

- If travel expenditures are approved, the reviewer must submit original receipts and documentation to the Office of Academic Affairs for reimbursement.